

Care and Courage

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Summary: Better start with 2nd chapter already! I started this as my egoistic need for certain type of a story. 1st chapter is pretty static and inward. You can skip it to get more and more action as it developed unexpectedly! I mean it. ;P

1. Chapter 1 Care and courage

Care and courage

The dawn was gone and the full sun was covering his whole body. From the top to the bottom, immersed in light. And almost not worth it.

The zombie must had been one of these smartest ones. It not only avoided any direct hit but also dodged pretty sneaky abdomen punch that he desperately made with his battered body. Time slowed down again, as usually during fights. Especially during fights with these guys. They were just relentless until completely dead.

Another deep and heavy breath to get himself together despite the soreness in his hands. Guns and the crowbar, guns and the crowbar and occasionally some other weapon. An alien weapon! Even these gloves finally made holding anything so painful. Before that, he only got a thumb contusion from using a computer mouse too much! Freakin mice never weight that much!

And then he had woken up from the sea of thoughts. Grose smell and noise just behind his back signalized that he had to turn around and fight! A punch!

World had become just a bit darker. Firstly just a notion of discomfort and then a tearing apart pain in his back. He moaned, pretty much because he got surprised, and after the first impression, terrified. He wanted to swing the crowbar so MAYBE he could still reach the monster's head, but it was too late. He looked down, on the

floor of this old warehouse or whatever was this building. He was standing on the stairs and there was no rail here...

Completely paralyzed, he just tried to cover his face before dropping to the ground, much too far away.

"Oh my god, is he alive?"

"No, just pretending! Stop staring and help me, Sarah!"

"You don't need to be so obnoxious!"

Someone touched him. Or at least it seemed so.

"AAah!"

"Yep, definitely alive! Hurray!" Commented much too cheerful female voice. A young voice.

"Heyâ€| Hey â€| manâ€| Just DON'T move!" Commanded male voice and it felt a little less painful this time. "Heyâ€| stay with me buddyâ€| Can you feel your legs?"

He was still feeling extremely drowsy but the voice, it meant something! So he blinked a few times, making effort to understand what the hell was going on.

"Hey!"

His body shivered. Eyes went wide open.

"Can YOU feel your legs? Move themâ€| justa bitâ€|"

He managed to focus his eyesight on the young guy, so that meant there must had been glasses somewhere on his face. Not even a scratch.

He managed to just slightly move his legs but sharp pain in his back made him wince silently. A few deep breaths before he regained his speech. His saviors did not seem to hurry at allâ€|

"So buddy, I'm Jack and this is Sarah." Started the dark haired boy and pointed to a blonde at the very edge of his sight. "We gonna get you outa here. And you got a nice suitâ€| It reminds me of-"

"That's my freaking curse, this suitâ€|" His voice was weak. He wasn't planning to reply like this, but at this point nothing really mattered. The pain slowly mixed in his backbone to become this dull and heavy sensation of all the back muscles being torn apart and burning, just to the top of his head. "I can't moveâ€|" He added with fear. "It hurts like hell, I don't have any more morphineâ€|"

"Morphine? How did you getâ€| Hey! Stay with me! Sarah, run and call the others."

>So in the beginning there was a lot of noise and someone was calling his name so often that it finally irritated him. He was sooo tired and hot. Drops of sweat felt dripping everywhere over his body,

covering him like an unwanted balm. But at least fear was gone.
Half-conscious, he felt like he was drowning. He gasped for air and raised his body. Someone gently pushed him back to bed. He felt like suffocating but then came this cool breeze and everything went back to normal. And even more movement and panic around. There were people around him. Saving him! Again.

The suit is not everything! The suit is not everything! It sounded like his own words, but from a distant, unknown speaker.

A wave of heat like in a dream of a bath in lava. Backbone seemed to just detach from the rest of the body making all of the muscles itch and cramp. Like during one of these night cramp attack, but all of the muscles in the same time. He must had been moaning more, because he remembered exciting even more rush somewhere around. The panels of the suit felt like disappearing slowly! His chest become lighter and lighter.

Gentle touches and a feeling of levitation. And a sharp injection, and pain just fading! With his consciousness!

"Alright Sarah. Now you hold this part stable and I'm gonna cut."

>More pain. Darkness!<p>

Then someone held his hand ad was saying something which made him feel really, really awkward.

"Just this one more and you'll rest." Explained a woman with so much care and anxiety that it almost made him shy.

And a knife must had cut through his lower back and deeper and deeper through the tissue. It felt like they want to kill him. Cutting edge of suffering made him completely mute. The woman screamed because he squeezed her palm so hard. If he hadn't lost all his senses, he could still apologize.

Eyes opened. A spasm. Just like in the old days, when he was a student. But these were nice times, these were parties. With girls and alcohol.

>And here, it was fight, fight, rest, thinking and fight again. Some fucking crazy nightmare for apocalypse zombie maniacs!<p>

"Ah!" He jumped on the bed and was immediately awake. He squinted his eyes and raised his left hand to cover his eyes. He regretted in the same time.

"Don't make such sudden movements, Gordon." Said some very rough voice. Or maybe just tired. "You've been in a coma for two days." Explained pretty much emotionless.

>He made out her shape finally after looking around in the bright room. The source of light was turned a bit to a side so he could see now. Pretty much a blur.<p>

In the same moment, a familiar suffocation feeling haunted his upper chest and he put left hand on his heart, in spite of a dull elbow pain. Tried to make an inhale with an effort and panic showing in his eyes.

"Aaah!"

"I've checked that. Just calm down. Your spine got its ass kicked very, very hard, but the suit managed to protect you from any major damage. You're still so strong, you crushed a finger of some lady visiting you." Her voice continued to be dry and sedate as she approached him with his glasses. Finally.

She came just too close and put the glasses on his nose. "It's a real miracle, that you are still among us, doctor."

It gave him chills.

2. Chapter 2 Care and silence

Care and silence - UPDATED

This time it was not a quick inject'n'go stuff as it had been happening usually while wearing HEV, that is, all damn time.

His backbone did not break just by some miraculous combination of the way he fell off the stairs and how tough the suit was in the first place. But it got shattered pretty bad at the lower back part. This was the awful pain he experienced as the last. Metal tiles penetrating his skin and flesh.

And he learnt that left elbow was bad and it was fuckin impossible to lift the right arm without being pierced by sharp soreness going from the shoulder blade right across to the base of his back.

Oh, and his addiction to morphine wasn't helping anything.

"I feel like a grandpa..."

"Just walk slowly and even if headcrab jumps right through this window, don't you dare to fight it!"

Gordon smiled with his eyes narrowed, because he hated this medicine woman! She never finished preaching him. She did not stop talking, commenting how stupid he was, taking all his risk on him, separating himself from the safe group of rebels... Ammo is so hard to get, and a crowbar is good for burglars...blah, blah, blah...
>He could even heard her during his still half- coma sleep one night, when they sneaked in, apparently to cut some more of his back, because they thought he needed even more scars.<p>

He hissed when lifting his right arm mindlessly. Well, the pain was so bad that it would be no use to fight anything with this arm. Unless zombies are afraid of hissing and cringing, defenseless humans.

She came closer and helped him to limp to the nearest seat.

"If only I was left-handed, that would work..." He said, feeling pretty much bored and irritated.

"If only you had some more common sense, doctor Freeman." Gordon could swear she was speaking like a robot, damn sexy robot, but still a machine. "Why didn't you wait for reinforcements?" She looked at him like an old teacher being very generous just not to spank him.

"Combine must have chased you for at least ten miles!"

Gordon sighted and turned his head around. But no one was coming to save him and he could not move fast and agile as he used to.

"Look! If I waited for anyone, I'd be dead! And half of the squad as well! You never went to a fight, huh?"

"I'm not a soldier, doctor and so aren't you. I'm just trying to understand what happened there. I've heard stories about you... From other medics... We need to learn about HEV suit, you know just in case we stumble upon you and..." She paused as she was afraid to reveal more, because his face was becoming somewhat reddish. Of anger.

He stared in her eyes but not really aware of that.

"I'm grateful for help."

"An hour or less and you'd be paralyzed. It's better to feel horrible pain than nothing at all..."

"Sometimes I don't agree with this opinion."

She almost nodded her head with deprecation.

"I am... Maybe a bit crazy, you know... We were outnumbered so I... just thought to separate myself from them. And hoped that Combine will chase only after me..." His voice went quieter, he looked down. "And they did."

"You just want to be a hero, don't you?"

"No, I was never a hero to anyone, doctor Smith."

"Call me Alice, please."

"The truth is I can be a real asshole if I want to. But war changes people... What I've gone through... I thought I'm gonna die so many times that it has changed me. Morphine just lets me to avoid thinking about the danger too much."

"Sounds like cliché, but yes, I understand what you mean." But she didn't sound like it.

"I'm pretty sure I'd end up in a mental institution if I didn't have to constantly fight for my life."

She giggled pretty much honestly and tapped his arm.

He stayed alone in the cleanest room they could find. Feeling bitter and even more sore. Maybe because his body begged for morphine and there was a shortage.

No one seemed to notice a dark, limping figure in the shadows of the main tent. He thought he may use some company, even though he didn't really want to talk to anyone. Ever. His body started burning, especially the backbone. Doctor said it's a sign of healing but pain in his joints, frustration and mild fever were more due to lack of his, desired or not, favourite drug.

But happy and flickering fire with sounds of people cheering was a nice change. He focused his eyesight on the flames, letting himself to wonder in his mind, just feeling like no one important. He grabbed some piece of wood spotted on the sand with his left hand and very cautiously tried to pluck it with his right palm. But then he discovered his very old thumb contusion reappeared.

"Damn!" He said and stopped playing.

He examined his right hand, rotated it slowly in reddish and yellow glow, as if he encountered a ghost of the past.

"Hey."

He almost jumped, but torn apart muscles just made him hiss again. He looked up and saw a familiar face in the twilight. It was Jack. He came to bother him. Great.

"Wassssssup doc?" Just as the boy said that, a group of younger rebels bursted with laugh and quickly spread, away from confused doctor Freeman.

Gordon gave them a deadly look so some went mute quickly and moved away their faces. Then he gave a psycho look to Jack, but Jack was just smiling so honestly.

"I.. I'm sorry! It was such news we have you here and we do not have much of real entertainment, doctor."

Gordon drew his eyebrows together and made a loud inhale. "You remind me of myself, except more stupid. I'm not the best entertainment around here."

Jack just laughed louder and sat down next to doctor.

"I know you are not that happy with what's going on currently, so..." The boy rolled his eyes. "Well..."

"I'm almost paralyzed but I don't have more patience. What do you want from me?"

"Alright! Doctor, this time we don't want anything! We have something small for you! We though, well..." Jack stuttered a bit and suddenly became very mysterious. Bended closer to doctor's face and whispered. "You said you don't have any more morphine, so... We decided to make you a small present."

Freeman's mouth opened and eyes went blank for a second. He tried to make a gesture with the right hand, frowned and put it down to the ground. And still was speechless.

"I know... I know... but you need this to fight, don't you? And withdrawal feels pretty bad I reckon, because you look like shit." Boy pulled something out from the inner jacket pocket and passed it to Gordon's left hand.

Still silence.

Frozen palm held the small package but without any further interest, at least not until the brain decides something...

"We have more than we need, don't believe doctor Smith, she's one little bitch. I swear she likes when her patients hurt more than needed." Jack grinned and tapped Gordon's right arm what almost made him cry with agony. "Oh shoot! Sorry!"

"Listen, Jack... What are you doing?" Gordon coughed his breath. "I was pretty much sure that all the rebels are more or less loyal and well organised." He gave him a sharp look. "People need this more than I do." I have a freakin hi-tech, state of the art suit!"

"No... Well, you may be right in general, but here..." He shook his head and wrinkled as if fighting with his thoughts. "Our post is kinda further away from the central... And we do not have the best CEOs here."

He looked away, checking if any other rebels were evesdropping. But they were just black, reddish and yellow shadows moving at the other side of the big fire. Some were eyeing them though. Curious and suspicious of what docotr's reaction is to the present.

Other's were just sipping cheap beer and chatting, like nothing happened.

"Well, continue so I won't tell your commander that you're stealing drugs."

"Jesus, Gordon! You are the freakin hero here!" Jack sighted and shrugged his arms. "We have taken over a huge load of Combine's supply crates a few months ago." His voiced turned to careful whisper. "Some people though we should share... Others decided we need to make it profitable or just keep this to ourselves. I know what I'm saying. I've seen the stash!"

Boy looked straight into Gordon's emerald eyes, now stunned but also tired.

"Huh?" Gorodn felt pretty much weak so suddenly. Not only he encountered a young drug deealer but was treated by a sadistic, corrupted doctor?

"I'm getting outa here!" He pulled himself togeher and tried to stand up.

It worked only with help of his new friend. He marched awkwardly to his room, as all the rebels stared at him, noticing sudden movement in the faint light of the flames.

>Doctor was still holding the small package and the young man following him, didn't dare to say anything more.<p>

"Where is the nearest—" Gordon stared when they reached the building but doctor Smith showed up suddenly out of the other corridor.

"Well, hello!" She nodded her head, feeling that something was wrong here. "I can see you're making friends."

She glimpsed at Gordon's left hand.

"Yes, very honest friends." He said with disgusted voice. Now he

really, really wanted to have some morphine, just to feel better. He started missing Alyx, even though she seemed out of his world, like all the humans and creatures in this current world. "I want to contact Alyx Vance. Now."

There is no fucking around when Gordon Freeman demands something.

Doctor lost her voice and self esteem for a moment, blinking.

"Er... Well... I assume it's something urgent..." She stopped, completely disarmed under his look. "...follow me. We're having some communication problems from time to time, you know, it's war... but we will do what we can."

He followed her, still angry on the whole situation. He didn't know if Jack was just lying but fuck it!

"I have time, Alice." He replied and she felt goosebumps. Not sure why.

"Last message from her team showed up..." Communications operator looked through some register, seeming completely unaware of their presence. "At 12.43 four days ago. She was sending message to alarm everyone about your..." Now the guy raised his head and spotted Gordon, as if he saw some exhibit. "...heroic escape, I presume? So we got this too and we followed coordinates. She saved your life!" He giggled.

A madman, though Gordon, looking at a pretty short guy wearing old, pale woolen hat and pair of fingerless gloves in the same, old and indefinite colour. I could end up like this too, he added in his mind.

"Well, contact her now." He ordered, thinking, why he haven't decided to do that earlier.

Maybe because he was in a coma?

3. Chapter 3 Care and morphine

Care and morphine

Somewhat quick, the first incoming transmission was the exact person he expected. He flushed everyone out of the room. A short look was enough. He felt so damn powerful, despite infinite pains in his joints and spine... But her voice made it at least a bit more bearable.

"Hey Gordon, we've been looking for you! Where the hell have you been hiding?"

"I wasn't hiding... I had... some problems..." He didn't want to make her worry too much. Not after this horrible experience when he was out of his mind for a couple of weeks and then was so close to a suicide. Yeah, nothing between them was the same since that... incident.

"Lots of problems wearing gas masks, huh? But you didn't try to kill yourself?" Her voice sounded a bit too cheerful. Maybe he just overreacted? "Are you alright? I can be there within..." He heard a noise and a muffled dialogue with some men in the background.

Good she can't see me right now. Maybe I could use a shave...

"Even in an hour! We have clear area right now! Combine must be scared of you! Ha!"

He rolled his eyes. It wasn't so easy to fight with fifty soldiers chasing you. Only by luck he managed to kill them all. That is, with help of zombies, that he killed afterwards. Zombies weren't that picky to attack ONLY him. He just hid in a vent and waited until the bullets stopped flying. Then he felt something trying to bite his feet off. With poor results.

"...So are you okay? Did you get hurt?" Demanding words dropped off the radio. He shook his head.

"I..." Okay, there is no sense to omit the truth, she will see him anyways. Even worse if within an hour.

"Gordon?"

"Alyx?" He responded with much more surprised tone. "Okay... I can barely walk, my back-"

"What?! What happened?! Do you have a good medic there? Did you get morphine?"

"I'm okay! I'm recovering... slowly. We got to talk once you arrive. Take a bunch of guys with you. Gotta go now."

"Huh? But..."

"Gotta finish, there is important transmission incoming!"

"Gordon!"

"Bye!"

So he TRIED to look at least like having a huge hangover. A decent dosage of morphine helped a lot. He also acquired not so much used razor. How did he manage not to cut his own throat while shaving with these shaky hands? Only he knew...

>Being a drug addict not because of his own will was the worst experience of his long drug usage history. During university years and until meeting... this creepy man, it was pretty much fun.<p>

But not when the suit was making him a morphine junkie just with every "minor fracture detected - major lacerations detected" Shit! He somehow never managed to discuss the morphine dosage function with Kleiner. He was already a heavy user and old man was so sensitive about his work. And he still wasn't sure how much THEY know that he doesn't KNOW. Insane circumstances! He laughed a bit, reminding himself about Llamarr, crazy old scientist must be really lonely... Unlike him. Gordon sighted.

Fighting aliens and Combine... He was happy to live and was horribly aware of being slowly pulled into the addiction. Like some supersoldier. But he wasn't a soldier, just as the doctor said. But killing was as easy as solving equations. Maybe even easier...

He limped out to the gate, now being opened. He felt anxious, rarely ever she could see him without HEV. Usually he was in deep trouble then.

Jack didn't dare to approach closer to Gordon. There was no real welcoming committee either. This facility was really corrupted! Young rebel was perfectly aware of that and what arrival of Alyx and already present legendary doctor could cause here. He focused his look on tired figure of strangely charismatic man. He surely didn't belong here, not now... Freeman was carrying death and destruction everywhere he went. So, that was exactly what they needed to kill the overpowering alien enemy.

The main guards gave them a sign from above and the gate door started moving very slowly. Doctor felt really anxious. Forced his eyes to find her figure in the faint lights of night lamps

And there she was. He winced to see her even better. Suddenly he felt weaker, bearing the weight of all she expected from him. He knew she was expecting him to be indestructible.

"Oh my god! Gordon!" She ran closer, not even waiting for a dozen of guys

>accompanying her. They sped up too. "Gordon!" She almost jumped onto him to give him a tight hug but he backed off quickly with his hand stopping her. She slowed down abruptly, just now perceiving the scale of his injuries. She scanned him with her big eyes, full of worry.<p>

"Please... don't. Just don't touch me too hard. I mean it."

He realized that every single scar and bruise must be visible now, where he was she was absolutely beautiful.

"Well, I'm happy too see you too." She shrugged her arms although still looking up and down his body. So he tried to stand straight but it was pretty much impossible.

"I'm sorry. Thank you for arriving."

"I assumed it would be better if I come here, instead of exposing you to more..." She looked down and delicately approached him with a gentle touch on his arms. He tensed his muscles instinctively but pain didn't occur. She was extremely cautious. It was a nice feeling, someone being really empathetic instead of trying beat the hell outta him. "I don't want you to risk until you completely recover..."

He smiled silently. Never was a type of a guy who turns into a poor child when having a flu. Being chased by mutant army and vicious headcrabs were his "flu".

"That might be hard." He fixed his glasses with some effort and looked more official now. "I'll explain you later. Let the guys hang around and we shall have a nice chit-chat in this place nearby."

4. Chapter 4 Care and Combine

Care and Combine

As they found themselves in the discreet place, Gordon became much more emotional all the sudden. Despite pains and overall soreness, still not completely eliminated by morphine. He took smaller dosage than he wanted originally.

Alyx felt a bit flabbergasted, seeing him walking forth and back. She thought of armed rebels that were accompanying her and it seemed that they could be useful for more than just formal protection. What was he up to this time?

"We have a problem here, Alyx." He looked at her as they just met. "Well, I-I..." He muffled for a few seconds.

"What?" She raised her voice, pretty much impatient.

"Gah!"

"Any more details?"

"How much do you know about this post? Do you contact these people often?" He gave her a look full of resignation. He'd abandon this place immediately, if his conscience let him. She saw that but pretended to think deeply.

"Hmm... Not really. We were having very intense operations at the north-eastern area lately. You know it, you have kinda... Mixed up our plans."

"Oh, don't remind me! I've almost died! Again!" He sat down and covered his eyes.

"They don't have much force or preparation anyways." She continued, slowly walking around Gordon and zooming her eyesight onto him as if he was a bomb. "This is a spare base, really... With good fortifications though."

"And they saved me but this very rebel base is corrupted. I could not tell you much on the radio."

"What?"

"That! My unexpected *visit* and my morphine need made some of the young rebels a bit too talkative."

"Oh, yes. Morphine." She reached to the inner pocket of her jacket and took out a small container. "Here, I know how much you may be suffering right now."

Freeman accepted yet another drug dosage, with a feeling of sheer irritation. He squeezed his palm on the box. Alyx stepped back

immediately.

"Damn, Gordon! I kept this especially for you! We don't have much but... Now you know there is always a special supply of anything you'd need."

"Oh Jesus..." He closed his eyes and sighted. "This is what I'm talking about! The commander and medic keep their huge supplies secret. I got to know about some stuff, but even rebels don't know everything."

"What?!"

"Well, yeah... While all good people save morphine for junkie Freeman, these guys here are sitting on a gold mine. You've seen Jack."

"Yes." She nodded her head with eyebrows wrinkled.

"He brought me a pretty nice supply of morphine already. I've done some investigating. But I got a feeling they're observing me... They did everything to mask the trails. Somewhat they even confused Combine." He shook his head with disbelief to what he just said.

He had been in depression because of lack of the drug and now everything was going towards anger. His brain went nuts. Close to furious. And they had taken away the crowbar!

"We got to talk to the commander." Said Alyx, not totally convinced of her own idea.

"We gotta talk to the medic who saved my life."

Alice welcomed Alyx and her "body-guards". There was some general "war with Combine" chat and some remarks about overwhelming lack of supplies. The commander was temporarily staying outside the base, and to Freeman's surprise, doctor Smith was the deputy.

"I'd like to thank you one more time for saving him. We were away and unable to act..."

"Oh, that's everyone's obligation to help each other." The medic said that with quite rough tone. She gave Gordon a longish look and he could only try to give an impression of feeling stronger than he was. He still felt piercing waves of overall weakness.

It wasn't just a drug hunger to fix...

"Not mentioning saving a man like doctor Freeman." She paused and both of her guests got a notion of discomfort on their skin.
"Although I can't say I always support methods you use to fight our mutual enemy..." Doctor Alice stopped again.

A sudden, total silence made them even more mute.

Alyx woke up first and took a quiet gasp. She looked straight into doctor's eyes, with her typical ease that Gordon was kinda jealous of.

"We are all people and we have already developed methods to reach an agreement among rebels." She directed her eyes onto Freeman for a moment. "I think this is not a place or time to discuss the tactics, we need the post commander for that. There is a matter that is more urgent and -"

BAAAM!

There was a huge noise outside close. Gordon's knees didn't make it. Ground shook not that much but the terrible pain in his back forgot about morphine.

"Combine! Incocoming! Shouted someone and a general rush started. A chaotic choir of voices preparing to a battle.

"Now!" Alice gave an order.

He managed to turn his head in the same second. Everything started happening so fast. Alyx screamed when someone kicked his back much stronger than needed. He just landed on the ground, close to puking.

He could barely see. Someone grabbed his rebel friend. He heard sounds of a short fight.

"Headcrabs people! This are not exercises!" Someone else run so close but no one would help!

"What..." Gordon whispered the only word before medic's face appeared so close.

"You've been leading us towards pointless mutiny and death for twenty fucking years! and you've been absent then!" She grumbled with voice saturated with pure hate. "And I'm gonna make it stay this way!"

He glimpsed at a side and saw Alyx unconscious on the ground. No! He thought and then noticed a huge guy standing behind Alice. He clenched his teeth and raised his head only to see...a Combine gas mask.

"No..." How could he be so stupid? So irresponsible?!

"I didn't kill you while operating only because it would look pretty much suspicious. Too many witnesses of me working on your back, you see. And this freaking suit is really kind of a magic... But now you're defenseless... Where is your crowbar, doctor?" She was just standing there, gloating over her great words of wisdom.

BAM!

Another sheer attack on the base but he only blinked. War battle seemed to omit this place.

He focused on his enemy. Gordon knew this type of people... Like Dr Breen. Lots of talking, little action. Little direct action. And there was only one Combine soldier here. Maybe one... He took another heavy breath, trying to make it not too deep, to cease the spine from cracking apart.

He tensed all available muscles.

"Doctor, Alyx! We have to—" one of her men just went down. The soldier shot him immediately.

Gordon sprung off his knees. He grabbed Alice and even overally sore, he was still stronger. The medic moaned with hatred. She tried to jerk off his hands but she was already his human shield. This was that another moment when Gordon though he already experienced the most awful pain he could. And there was always a new pain awaiting!

Blank stare of Comine's servant didn't reveal any emotions, nor his body. The gun was pointed in the same direction that made the rebel very unlucky.

Gorodn just kept on breathing heavily, one hand holding Alice's wrists and the other very thight on her neck. He could murder anyone now! Damn! He had killed so many people! Never done it with bare hands though...

>He though it was stupid, because outside there are headcrabs and probably a few dozens of Combine.<p>

"You think you're gonna achieve anything, Freeman?" Whispered his hostage visciously. He could feel her body shaking with fear. Good. "The Combine came back to take their supplies." She made an effort to sound happy, although her laugh was very vauge.

"I am Gordon Freeman. And I'm holding my hand ready to break your neck, or strangle, you choose."

The soldier did not move. Apparently his simplified brain could not handle this situation well. Or he knew there was no need to rush...

"Shoot him!" She shouted. "What are you waiting for!" Freeman squeezed her neck just a bit tighter. Now he felt so scared. This was just a sheer luck, that he was stil standing.

Then he felt someone's presence behind him.

"Friend or foe?" Asked Gordon, pretty much getting mad. Alice treid another insuffcient attack to free herself.

"It's me." Said faint female voice with very thick eastern-european accent. And she fired.

The soldier moaned and collapsed with this characteristic growl and radio squeak that always made him feel pleasure. Like a Pavlov's dog.

The medic took her chance. She stepped on Gordon's foot with all her weight. A moment of disruptance and his hands went soft and knees jelly. He tumbled down trying to still hold the hostage within the reach.

She slipped away.

"No!" Exclaimed Sarah. She was aiming into Alice now, but she looked

very unsure. Her face was ready to cry. "You stay here!" She added looking at the medic slowly backing off.

"You're not gonna shoot me, girl! I saved your brother! You remember that." Her voice went high pitched.

"Get up Freeman!" Sarah commanded.

Freeman was fighting for air. His vision blurred completely. Only girls strongly pronounced "r" made his mind not run away into safe half-sleep.

"Get up! Take Alyx!" She demanded.

You take Alyx, I'm barely conscious, though Gorodn.

And then a blade of fear gave him adrenaline rush. His vision went crystal clear and he noticed the woman!

"Alyx!" He jumped to the figure lying on the floor.

"Bye bye, suckers!" Doctor Smith flew away and Grodon didn't care. He didn't care to grab dead soldier's gun. And he loved their efficient guns. He didn't care that Sarah didn't shoot and lowered the pistol and started crying.

Alyx was alive. At least, unconscious she was a bad material for a hostage.

"Aaaahhh..." He tried to say that he can't even sit now.

Please someone take care of Alyx, please...

And then he heard more people entering the room. And Sarah shouting something but he was going straight back to his coma.

5. Chapter 5 Living Legend

"Please, help her..." He whispered so faintly that none of the rebels could really make out the words.

"We have to get to the HEV suit as fast as possible!" Commanded a strong male voice. "He won't make it anymore!"

It was hard to remain conscious, but just to be sure that SHE is SAFE. Give her the damn suit! One breath after another, he tried to open his eyes. It was becoming harder and harder. Somewhere deep, a glimpse of no-hope showed up. It lit up for a second and faded away...

"Where did this bitch hide it?! Is it even fixed?"

"Yeah, Clarke was supposed to fix it. He also promised to move it to the evacuation point ... But he may be as well dead by now..."

Everything went blurry in his mind, like a temporary high, no sounds, just white noise. So he couldn't hear if Alyx is safe. Where was she?

"How can a ridiculous, orange suit, from twenty years ago help him?! I'm surprised he IS still alive! Freakin weirdo!" Commented some woman as he experienced feeling of being lifted.

"He's not that heavy... Thanks god! We have to abandon this building ASAP."

"Please, shut up Berta. You have a living legend in the flesh here!"

"More like a living murder- maniac junkie..." The tone was pretty irreverent.

"C'mon ladies! Cover me! Off we go!" The commander of this small squad seemed unmoved by anything that had been said.

"I still think he's hot..." Interjected another female voice.

He almost smiled... He missed those times. When world was more dating friendly. And less murderous.

"Ah!" A powerful breath, almost exhausting.

Eyes wide open, he raised his body in total panic!

...adminstered._ Finished the soft suit voice.

"Calm down Freeman." Thick accent girl put her palm on his shoulder. "You aR betteR now." His hearing was much better too. Amazing accent!

Gordon turned his head and saw that her palm had the middle finger wrapped in a bandage.

"Oh... It's you." He mumbled. "I... I'm so sorry for your finger." He suddenly remembered what this sneaky doctor creature had told him. This girl was holding his hand... Did she pretended to be Alyx? He wiped sweat off his forehead.

>That would be a little... odd?<p>

He calmed down his breath and sent her another shy look.

She just smiled so innocently. A beautiful girl, he thought. She looked very Slavic.

"It's ok FReeman. It's not bRoken. YouR pain was much, much woRse."

He was in some other building than before. If any of these ruined buildings with cracked walls and scattered wallpapers could really make any difference... Only thickness of walls counted.

>There was a bunch of rebels crouching quietly, meditating close to the walls, their raw figures drawn in the twilight. All in positions ready to fight. None of them really paid attention to him. He looked around and then heard slightly muted noises coimng from the outside. He glimpsed at a small window at the top of one wall. Maybe it was close to dusk? The light let him see Sarah so clear.
Nah... These

must had been spotlights that were still working.

>Nothing new to listen, mostly shots, screams of people and Combine attacked by rebels or, what he was always happy with, zombies.<p>

"What's- " He started with his voice raised.

"You may notice that youR suit is on." Explained Sarah.

"Wha.. Oh!" He looked down on his chest. Obviously, this is why he felt so much better. No pains bringing him close to agony.

He streteched his arms and fingers. Black gloves fitted perfectly, and all the other parts. The one good thing about this whole situation was that he absolutely had NO chance to put on weight. He never told anyone, but he was pretty chubby in some part of his childhood. And HEV felt like a second skin, more like a part of his own body!

He opened his mouth again.

"Alyx should be safe, but she's not here. Fled with bigger squad to nort-east base. They managed to make it before the first dropship. And people are coming just right now to help us too!" Answered Sarah.

"And how they- "

"Alice is gone, at least that we know." Sarah rolled her eyes.
>He kinda got used to her pronunciation.<p>

That was a brief meeting with Alyx... He thought.

"How long- "

"Just about fifteen minutes. You've been unconscious for fifteen minutes."

"Damn!" It felt like ages!

He sprang onto his feet, searching for any gear he could use. Then the world spunned.

"Whoa..." Said the squad commander quickly, holding him. "You're not going there. Suit keeps you alive man! We're going to stay here until the slaughter is over!"

Then all of the rebels turned silently to Gordon, but more as to a potential threat, not a saviour. He could barely see their eyes, just flashes of whites in the dark.

"I have to..." He slowly sat down, drifting calmly on another gentle morphine high. "Give me a gun!"

"Freeman! You..." Shouted commander after a man abruptly running out of a small building at a far corner of the main battlefield. "Cover this bastard!" Another order was bearly hearable.

Gordon was running like crazy, not the first and hopefully last time.

He clenched his fingers on a shotgun he jerked off out of surprised rebel's arms. Once the guy noticed his deadly look, he let go the gun. Gordon moved a machine gun closer to his side. Everything done in a speedrun.

>Fighting figures blinking on his left. As always he had his heart terrified of bullets flying here and there, luckily none directed at him...<p>

There was a small chance that doctor Alice Smith was still present around here. He should have asked this question at first. Damn pretty girls always mess up his head!

Alice HAD to collect some of her treasure.

He blinked while sweeping the area with his eyes. There was no doubt, more zombies killing the Combine than actual rebels still alive. And of course, some ZOMBINES. He barely ignored infected soldier exploding in a flash, taking with himself a few Combine pals. One scared headcrab rushed to find a shelter on a dead gas mask.

Fucking zombines...

Yeah, Alyx had a great talent for very bad jokes.

"That makes you kinda weird, woman!" He whispered to himself just while climbing a small wall.

>How come no one tried to kill him yet?<p>

"Shit!" A piece of a wall sprinkled out an inch from his head. Gordon panicked and found a crack to lock his foot in. Pushed off and flew above the barrier ... and lost his machine gun.

Hard ground landing made him hiss again.

_ "Minor fracture detected." _

This corner was covered in the dark. He cursed his awkwardness and sped up, to reach not so distant, broken tower drawn like an abstract sculpture on the navy blue sky.

This is where she should still be. Or at least the rest of the buried treasure. What did they REALLY hide there?

Gordon stopped in the last moment, before almost running into a Combine patrol. He squatted behind some ruined, chest high wall. Shotgun was ready. He loved shotguns, they always got him double kill, a dead zombie body and a dead headcrab. Headshot miracle!

There was no one here except them. This was a wasteland area, radioactive, with no protection areas whatsoever. no point to attack. So she might had been here still. Dead or even alive. Soldiers seemed unusually calm.

A blast! He squeezed his lips not to make a noise of despair. A huge, huge blast torn apart the twilight far behind him. Combine servants became quiet as well.

Gordon froze for a second with his shotgun ready and eyes closed. Trying to calculate their position. They always moved like programmed robots. More or less predictable patterns... This had to be quick.

>Got up! Gaze on the left gas mask. BAM! Right mask! BAM!<p>

One of them seemed to say "Fr..." Just before his head exploded.

Piece of cake. Gordon didn't even wipe bloody pieces off his face. He grabbed Combine machine gun in a rush and moved on.

Doctor Alice didn't look so much teriffied when a headless body fell thtough a glassless window. The body made a deaf thump like an annoucement. A few seconds after, two Combines grumbled helplessly in a chamber next to hers. She unlocked her gun, thinking that maybe she should have had twice as much protection. No, unless Freeman was dead, protection had no sense anyways. Dumbass soldiers could not find him sooner! So he had his revenge!

She should have killed him when they brought him. Defensless, in shattered suit! But some rebels were already suspicious then!

Alice stepped back away from the main source of light and grabbed two bags. She put them on her shoulder, quite heavy. then she quickly pushed a button on a small, dark and strange device. She left it on a table.

>With eyes glancing around everywhere Alice tried to be as quiet as possible. Just three minutes... She NEEDS to hold three minutes.<p>

A breath. He appeared out of the dark, with a badass Com,bine machine gun, aimed at her.

>she froze in terror, because his eyes were cold. This man was nothing like before. Alice didn't drop her pistol though. He didn't want to kill her yet. she hoped for that.<p>

"Drop the gun." He said emotionlessly."Now!"

Alice stood there motionless. He could not see her face, but the gun was visible enough. This time, a real sunrise was coming. Summer time delivers it fast.

"so we meet again... Two doctors serving opposite forces." She chewed every word slowly, staring at him with grey eyes.

Gordon got this vibe before, as if she knew MORE than everyone he ever met. A notion of doubt went through his face. Only because of this secret she was still alive. Or at least not hurt. Not yet!

"Drop the fucking gun!" He shouted angrily and raised the badass cannon." He decided to make it quick. "I'm gonna shoot you if you won't! I don't care THAT much!" His voice sounded like of a broken man.

She opened her lips slightly and gun slipped out her palm. She raised

her arms slowly, but not too high.

"you won't know the truth, even if you torture me." She started explaining while he approached. He came so close, almost like a lover, very dangerous lover. And much too young for her...

"What's in there? What was that in that ship? answer!"

Barrel of the gun was pushing her stomach. She regretted again not killing him, when he was almost dead anyway!

Alice looked down, his face was too well visible. With all the shadows spilled across his face, he looked twenty years older.

"they're coming here now. A whole squad. Can you fight twenty soldiers again?"

His heavy breath became weaker. He seemed to be losing temper. He took away her bags, as if he stopped carrying if she attacks him. She stayed stiff, staring at his face, satisfied that she didn't reveal the secret.

Gordon stepped back into the dark while putting precious bags on his arm.

"I'm not gonna kill you, not just like that!" He was angry but very tired. "I'm just an accidental hero, a pawn in a war I don't understand...You can't kill the king by killing a pawn..."

That was not what she wanted to hear. Something broke inside of her too.

>She shooked her head. This story again. A lost, confused young man! Treated cruelly by the fate! But she knew! She knew the truth! The man with a briefcase was very sincere!<p>

"Better run! These bags contain something precious for you! But don't show this to anyone... He probably already knows..." She turned around to get down on her knees. Hand on the head. Ready for further cooperation with Combine.

>Her voice echoed in his ears accompanied by much too familiar grunts of soldier's radio transmissions.<p>

He started running the same way he arrived here. A few second after he killed two of the guys, a thud in his back stunned him for good. Again.

"Minor fracture-"

"Shyyesh?!"

"What?"

"Shyyesh chluviekoo?"

"Mhmm... Yes, I'm..." He could move his head was trying to explode..." I'm okay..." Nothing new...

"Okay, okay." Said happily the stranger and kept on nodding his head to emphasize his body language. "to ty jestesh ten legendarny Gordon

Freeman?" He mumbled encouraging.

"Mhh... Yes, it's me! Gordon..." He looked around, not sure where he was. Apparently these were ruins of radioactive ruins he visited at night. That would explain why the guy was wearing a mini version of a gas mask. And some kind of protective suit. "I'm sorry, I can barely make out what you're saying. Spanish? French?"

"No, no French!" Apparently happy man shook his head with disapproval. "Polski!"

"Polish... Hmm... Dziekuyee" That was the only one word he could remember. Before they take him and take off the suit.

his new friend kept on staring at him with pericingly joyful psycho eyes. Very nicely... Gordon started thinking how to tell him that he can't stand up. He could not feel any pain. He could not feel his back at all.

End
file.